

New Signs and Regulations to Take Effect at Willard's Woods

In mid-December, new signs will begin appearing at the entrances to the Willard's Woods conservation area. The large green signs now at the entrances will be replaced by blue-and-beige signs with less wording, directed specifically to visitors with dogs. The new signs reflect regulations passed by the Lexington Conservation Commission in the Commission's on-going effort to achieve a satisfactory system of off-leash hours for dogs in Willard's Woods. Currently, all dogs in Willard's Woods must be kept on leash on weekends, although they may be walked off leash on weekdays. The latest steps were taken with a view to the eventual establishment of a permit system to enable permit holders to walk their dogs off leash on weekends. The new signs were designed by a group consisting of Commission members and representatives of the Conservation Stewards, abutters to Willard's Woods, and the Friends of Willard's Woods, an organization of dog owners that has been working to restore off-leash weekend hours there.

The new regulations are intended to accomplish two things: 1) to ensure that the unleashed dogs in conservation land are under the effective control of their guardians and 2) to ensure that dog waste is removed from the property. Specifically, the regulations provide that:

- Dogs in conservation land must be under the immediate restraint and control of their guardian, either by leash, or by sight and voice command. Sight and voice command means that the dog:
 - is within its guardian's sight at all times
 - comes immediately when called
 - stays at its guardian's command
 - does not charge or chase any person, dog or wildlife, nor engage in any behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as aggressive
- No more than 2 dogs per person are permitted
- Guardians must carry a waste bag for each dog in their care and pick up and properly dispose of their dogs' waste
- Guardians must carry a leash for each dog in their care

Those regulations apply to all conservation land. An additional regulation applies only to Willard's Woods: all dogs must be on leash when entering and exiting Willard's Woods at its major entrances, on Brent Road and on North Street, and within a designated zone near the entrance. The on-leash entrance zones were created to address problems of uncollected dog waste at the entrances, as well as to minimize incursion by unleashed dogs into nearby private property. New signs will mark the inner boundary of the on-leash zones and will advise dog guardians when they may unleash their dogs.

In Willard's Woods, it remains the case that dogs must be on leash on Saturdays and Sundays at all times. However, a weekend off-leash permit system is under development. The Conservation Commission is currently working to create an educational video. Once the video is finished, a permit system can be established when funds become available to implement it.